

**IMPROVING PRONUNCIATION BY MEANS OF ONLINE COLLABORATIVE  
STUDY GROUPS**

**BY**

**DANIEL ESTEBAN LOAIZA QUINTERO**

**MANUEL CAMILO LOAIZA QUINTERO**

**UNIVERSIDAD TECNOLÓGICA DE PEREIRA**

**FACULTAD DE BELLAS ARTES Y HUMANIDADES**

**LICENCIATURA EN BILINGÜISMO CON ÉNFASIS EN INGLÉS**

**PEREIRA**

**2018**

**IMPROVING PRONUNCIATION BY MEANS OF ONLINE COLLABORATIVE  
STUDY GROUPS**

**Research project**

**BY**

**DANIEL ESTEBAN LOAIZA QUINTERO**

**MANUEL CAMILO LOAIZA QUINTERO**

**Advisors:**

**Claudia Andrea Cárdenas Jiménez**

**Ronald Alan Perry**

**UNIVERSIDAD TECNOLÓGICA DE PEREIRA**

**FACULTAD DE BELLAS ARTES Y HUMANIDADES**

**LICENCIATURA EN BILINGÜISMO CON ÉNFASIS EN INGLÉS**

**PEREIRA**

**2018**

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

We would like to express our gratitude to Professor Claudia Andrea Cárdenas Jiménez whose original idea it was to do this study. We also appreciate her guidance, time and the encouragement she devoted to our paper when we needed it. Likewise, we want to thank Professor Ronald Alan Perry for his invaluable support given to us during the development of the project.

## **ABSTRACT**

This paper aims to explore the impact of online collaborative groups to teach and learn English pronunciation in a public university in Colombia. The participants of the project were sixteen students who belonged to a group of Pronunciation II from an English teaching program. For around three months, learners implemented pronunciation strategies like reading aloud, karaoke, minimal pairs, tongue twisters, and recordings to practice pronunciation while posting tasks on the platform named Facebook. Afterwards, they were asked to provide feedback to their peers based on mistakes related to segmental and suprasegmental aspects of the language. In the end, it was found that constant practice eventually contributed to the improvement of pronunciation. Autonomy and cooperation played a crucial role in the project as students needed to take full control of their learning and cooperate with their peers to achieve the goals. Participants benefitted from working and studying on an online platform as they had a lot of access to computers and internet. And although when giving feedback to their peers, students did not always focus on pronunciation, participants did address phonemes and other pronunciation issues for correction, which set participants on the path to learning and improvement.

## **RESUMEN**

Este documento busca explorar el impacto de los grupos colaborativos de estudio en un ambiente virtual para la enseñanza y aprendizaje de la pronunciación Inglesa en una universidad pública de Colombia. Los participantes del proyecto fueron diez y seis estudiantes pertenecientes a un grupo de “Pronunciación II” de un programa de formación para enseñar inglés. Por alrededor de tres meses, los participantes implementaron estrategias de pronunciación como la lectura en voz alta, karaoke, pares mínimos, trabalenguas y grabaciones, para practicar la pronunciación mientras publicaban los ejercicios en la plataforma llamada Facebook. De igual forma, se les requirió a los aprendices el retroalimentar a sus compañeros basándose en los errores cometidos en relación a los aspectos segmentales y suprasegmentales de la lengua. Al termina se encontró que la naturaleza de la práctica constante finalmente contribuyó al mejoramiento de la pronunciación. La autonomía y la cooperación jugaron un rol crucial en el proyecto ya que los estudiantes tuvieron que tomar control total de su aprendizaje además de cooperar con sus compañeros para alcanzar los objetivos. Los estudiantes se beneficiaron del haber trabajado y estudiado en una plataforma virtual debido a las grandes facilidades de acceso a un computador e internet. Y aunque a la hora de retroalimentar a los compañeros el enfoque no siempre fue en aspectos del lenguaje, los participantes ciertamente identificaron fonemas y otros elementos de la pronunciación para ser corregidos, lo que eventualmente llevó a los aprendices al camino del progreso y del aprendizaje.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	I
ABSTRACT (ENGLISH).....	II
ABSTRACT (SPANISH).....	III
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	IV
1. Introduction.....	1
2. Statement of the problem.....	2
3. Research questions.....	5
4. Conceptual framework.....	5
5. Related researches.....	15
6. Methodology.....	17
6.1. Type of research.....	17
6.2. Type of study.....	18
6.3. Context.....	19
6.4. Setting.....	19
6.5. Participants.....	20
6.6. Data collection methods.....	20
6.7. Data analysis.....	22
6.8. Researchers' role.....	22
6.9. Pedagogical intervention.....	23
6.10. Ethical considerations.....	26
7. Findings.....	26
7.1. Feedback: a delicate process in online collaborative study groups.....	27
7.1.1. The type of feedback evidenced in OCSGs: positive reinforcement....	27
7.1.2. Perceptions towards feedback: affective filter.....	30
7.1.3. Common features on which feedback was provided.....	32
7.2. The role of autonomy in online study groups: self-directed learning and self-regulation.....	35
7.3. Phonological awareness: the impact of OCSGs on English pronunciation.....	38

8.	Pedagogical implications.....	40
9.	Conclusion.....	42
10.	References.....	44

## **1. Introduction**

Having a clear pronunciation remains a key skill to acquire when learning a second language. This plays a crucial role in developing intelligible speech. This study describes the experience of a group of sixteen students from a public university in a collaborative virtual environment whose objective was to improve English pronunciation.

In the first part of the document, the reasons why the project is being conducted are explained in detail, taking into consideration lack of emphasis on teaching pronunciation in many classrooms, and the advantages found in the inclusion of technology in academic environments.

The theoretical basis which support the present study are presented while discussing the ideas of authors in the field. The first concept is pronunciation as the main speaking subskill to be developed by participants with respect to segmental and suprasegmental features of the language. Additionally, some strategies to practice pronunciation are presented as crucial tools to attain the objectives of the project. Collaborative learning is explored, considering that the study aimed at having participants help each other by identifying mistakes made on pronunciation. Finally web tools are addressed in terms of the benefits they can bring to learning and teaching.

In the next section, the methodology used in the project is explained in terms of the type of study, the context where the project was conducted, the setting, the participants' background with respect to students' ages and English level, the methodological procedures, the researchers' role, the data collection methods, and the data analysis



Findings are explained in terms of the data collected during the course of the project, and these are compared with different authors' ideas. Likewise, some general conclusions are presented, and some recommendations are given for those who perhaps intend to implement a similar project in the future.

## **2. Statement of the problem**

Considering the number of aspects that influence adult L2 pronunciation acquisition, such as language aptitude, phonemic coding ability, developmental readiness, working memory (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010; Juffs & Rodriguez, 2007), motivation and amount of L2 exposure, instruction, and use (Lightbown & Spada, 2006) specific actions need to be undertaken in order to prompt learners to enhance their phonological abilities. Among these actions, collaborative study groups have been regarded as a meaningful tool, since research has proved collaborative work as effective inasmuch as learners have the opportunity to express themselves, discuss their ideas, and find solutions towards specific problems (Johnson & Johnson, 1989). It has been found also that learning within a group helps students develop higher-order thinking skills such as: critical thinking, skills of self-reflection, co-construction of knowledge and meaning, and problem solving skills (Brindley, Walti, & Blaschke, 2009; Moller, 1998).

Nowadays, learners are being exposed to different devices that allow them to be in contact with the world, which strongly prompts teachers to reconstruct their roles in terms of technology usage accounting for collaborative learning processes as well as cultural understanding (Bonilla, 2012). Accordingly, online environments comprise collaborative as

well as cooperative approaches when performing inasmuch as they provide tools for participants to share and to interact taking into account the facility for creating materials to outsiders (Anderson, 2010). Moreover, as it is established by Chen Jack, H., & Goswami, J. S. (2011), a cooperative learning methodology for English language students, fosters constructive peer interaction, active learning, non-threatening environment, group dynamics, and cooperation for the attainment of a common goal.

Notwithstanding, pronunciation is not given the importance it deserves, for it has been “swept under the carpet” (Brown, 1991; Pronunciation Second Language Teaching Conference, 2014), which means that pronunciation has been given insufficient attention at a global and a local scale in the English Language Teaching scenarios. Considering this fact, many attempts have been made in order to integrate this competence in the language curriculum. However, this is rarely a matter of interest at a national level, which is evidenced on the low number of research studies conducted in this area, and the little focus that this skill has in the language classroom. (Gutierrez, 2005). Proof of this, lies on the importance of the proposal for the actual English teaching, and for English learning at the Licenciatura program, since based on professor’s pronunciation experiences in the program, there is a lack of opportunities for students to perform in the classroom because of the amount of students as well as the amount of time given to the subject per week. With reference to the problematic situation, Gutiérrez (2005) considers that the little attention on Pronunciation is caused by different factors such as the number of students per classroom, the insufficient amount of tools for learning, the lack of motivation to learning. In addition, the author states that these factors affect the students' oral performance inasmuch as they are not able to convey meaning due to the fact that their intelligibility is highly affected by

pronunciation errors.

Taking into account the aforementioned, and how pronunciation has become an aspect of foreign language, in which learners may not have a conception of what it implies nor how to improve it effectively (He, 2011), this study aims to report how the implementation of online communities as a tool for Colombian University Students to keep contact and interact among them, will affect their language pronunciation, supported by how teaching pronunciation has changed its emphasis regarding oral communication, suprasegmental features rather than segmental, individual learner needs, meaningful practices, peer correction, and group interaction (Castillo, 1991 cited in Hismanoglu, M. 2006); additionally, it is highlighted how participants who are involved in a web 2.0 process feel stimulated when performing online as it entails participation, collaborative work, communication, and information shared (Wand and Velazquez, 2012)

Thus, it is proposed this online pronunciation collaborative community in which learners will bear the chance to complement their teaching learning process by interacting with their peers' contributions, by providing collaborative feedback within study groups, and by developing their knowledge together. Moreover, it will address research regarding the inclusion of specific actions that empower learners with tools for taking control of their own learning, in terms of pronunciation. Currently, the e-learning is being taken as an important source to promote any type of learning considering how on online learning communities the professor as well as the students will have the appropriate conditions in terms of time and accessibility to achieve the goals of the class (Pennington, M. 1999). Likewise, at the Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira, and more closely to the Licenciatura program, despite the fact that in UNIVIRTUAL courses, it has been possible to apply

online collaborative learning processes, teaching English pronunciation has not been explored yet throughout this pedagogical compound.

This proposal should provide some theoretical foundations with regards to the application of online collaborative communities on English language learning theory specifically in pronunciation accounting for the different studies that have been conducted in Colombia and at the Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira in this particular case. For that reason, future research projects conducted in the same program will have some study bases that might be considered along the way

### **3. Research questions**

1. How can online collaborative study groups contribute to the improvement in EFL pronunciation teaching and learning?
2. What is the impact of giving feedback on students' pronunciation in OCSGs?
3. What is the role of autonomy in OCSGs?

### **4. Conceptual Framework**

In order for this research to have a theoretical foundation, three main constructs will be explained considering different author's perspectives; these concepts are pronunciation, web tools, and collaborative learning. Likewise, as the document goes along, the three constructs will be associated to each other to draw an appropriate background of the study.

#### **Pronunciation**

Nowadays, English has become an important language around the world, which is a reason why learners need to develop an understandable pronunciation in it (Tooley et al. 2003). Likewise, Harmer (2011) remarked how pronunciation is not only intended towards the mastering of different sounds and what they are, but also the way it fosters an actual speaking improvement. On the same line, Liu, (2008) concludes that “Pronunciation is important to second language learners because of its essential roles in oral communication, listener perception and speaker identity” (p.1). Accordingly, Labov & Wiliam (2003) proposed a definition of pronunciation described as the knowledge pertaining the different features of the target language phonological system, and the capacity for using them appropriately within the discourse. Finally, Gilakjani, A. P. (2012) besides defining, she attributes some features to pronunciation by establishing that:

“Pronunciation refers to the production of sounds that we use to make meaning. It includes attention to the particular sounds of a language (segments), aspects of speech beyond the level of the individual sound, such as intonation, phrasing, stress, timing, rhythm (suprasegmental aspects), how the voice is projected (voice quality) and, in its broadest definition, attention to gestures and expressions that are closely related to the way we speak a language” (p.1).

When pronunciation is reflected from a teaching perspective, Harmer (2011) explained that almost the majority of English teachers focus on teaching mainly grammar, vocabulary, reading, listening, and certain functional dialogues, while pronunciation is passively considered. Studies as conducted by Breitzkreutz, Derwing, and Rossiter (2001) verify the existing exclusion of pronunciation in pedagogical learning as well as remark the lack of adequate instruction pertaining to this language aspect. Furthermore, despite the fact

that teaching pronunciation has evolved from the earliest approaches in which imitation was the basis (Direct and Naturalistic method) to the current dominant Communicative Method focused on peer work and group interaction (Liu, Y., 2008); Gholami et al. (2013) state that most of the high-school 's work books are still connected to the traditional teaching approaches.

On the other hand, and accounting for Hartshorn' (2006) thoughts, difficulties in pronunciation not only affect a successful communication, but it will also cause misunderstandings in the perception of the native English speakers. He (2011) agreed that with relation to good pronunciation in a foreign language, neuromuscular aspects interfere into the sounds of different phonemes. In that sense, Harmer (2011) again sheds light to the matter by suggesting how teaching pronunciation ought to develop students' competences to make themselves understood (intelligibility) rather than native-like accents. Hartshorn' (2006) ideas report how some students unknown the importance of acquiring a quality level of this skill in order to be comprehended while communication takes place. Therefore, this specific language aspect is one of the most relevant abilities in English Teaching (Pourshosseini et al., 2011). Subsequently, He (2011) portrays that when students are involved in a learning pronunciation process, they may not obtain a systematic and specific awareness of what it implies, nor how to promote improvement efficiently.

Considering the aforementioned, different pronunciation strategies and techniques will be presented below:

Harmer (2011) suggests for working on pronunciation to identify items from a list (listening a series of words and checking the ones which are included in the printed list),

comparing minimal pairs (analyzing the difference between “day-they” not only in sound but in meaning), and using the phonetic symbols to clarify specific sounds. He also adds that these techniques might satisfy students who have different needs and attitudes towards pronunciation practice.

Rehearsing correction aloud which Sardegna (2009) remarks to be a good method for reflecting on the type of practice learners typically do when learning new L2 skills. The same author comments that after performing one of the pronunciation learning strategies with a given speech excerpt (i.e., critical listening, listening + transcription, or listening + transcription + annotating corrections), learners orally produce each speech excerpt, and implement the suggested feedback aiming to make their production as accurate as possible in terms of the target pronunciation features, during and following each rehearsal, learners monitor and evaluate their output, with the goal of identifying modifications that are needed in subsequent rehearsals in order to make their oral production target-like.

One PLS that has been vastly defined and addressed as productive for developing control over one’s pronunciation aspects is critical listening. This strategy is defined by Izumi (2003), as a learner’s deliberate intent for listening to their own production in order to identify non-target features. The same author claims that listening holistically may allow a learner to identify the most noticeable features, such as the use of too many fillers and self-repairs or a lack of fluency. In this strategy, listening is meant to be more detailed and systematic, a critical process that provides an opportunity for learners to focus on their L2 production at the segment, syllable, word, phrase, and discourse levels.

Another strategy that could be taken into consideration for practicing and improving

pronunciation is reading aloud. Reading aloud can bring different benefits to EFL learners in the classroom, as participants are expected to produce actively incorporating their real life communication (Nurani, Siti & Rosyada, Amrina, 2015).

Rengifo, A. (2009) believed that karaoke could be a promising aid for getting students interested in learning: likewise, he considered that this strategy not only could motivate students in the classroom, but also promote actual pronunciation improvement. Based on his ideas, Karaoke is another tool given for learning pronunciation as music itself can be memorable and fun.

## **Web Tools**

Along this section, it will be possible to examine how web tools involve processes that certainly affect learning and teaching environments taking into account pronunciation in online settings. In this order, teaching has evolved during the last 20 years starting with manual methods in which a blackboard and chalk were the only elements to work with, followed then by the overhead transparencies reflected on whiteboards; afterward, the generation of photocopies and text processors, electronic delivery such as power point and windows files, and by the end, web-based task and interactive web pages emerged (Verhaart, M., & Kinshuk, 2004).

With regards to the definition of virtual settings in terms of pedagogical implications, some authors such Anderson, (2010) comprises in a document for UNESCO how web 2.0 refers to different elements and tools that encourage users to share, interact, and collaborate with others concerning the facility that everyone has to create or publish his/her own materials to outsiders. Correspondingly, Zambrano, B. & Perez, M. (2013)



establishes that Virtual Platforms promotes teaching learning development on the grounds that it provides unlimited ways of producing and presenting information, fosters communication among individuals, encourages professors' role as guiders, stimulates participants' autonomous work with non-restrictions in terms of time and place, and it allows to keep track along the process; in this sense, it may be beneficial for teachers to incorporate these virtual tools into their classes inasmuch as they can generate pedagogical activities for the reinforcement of face-to-face academic labors.

Another conception to bear in mind is that in order to implement successfully web based courses, it is necessary to modify students and facilitator's roles inasmuch as learners are required to be active participants as well as autonomous regarding their learning process, while guiding and giving instructions strategies that actually empower the prior mentioned aspects entail the essential educators' endeavor (Kim, Kyung-Sun, & Moore, J., 2005). Howland' J. L., & Moore, J. L., (2002) ideas on the matter reported that students perceive online courses to be of low quality with relation to face to face academic environments. In contrast to the latter, Warschauer, M. (1998) state that a computer mediated learning process promotes participants' academic advantages in the sense that it allows them to have an increased time output production which comes to prompt language accuracy, learners are able to notice scripted patterns that might not identify in face to face classes as well as they can develop contributions without interrupting. Moreover, Ellis' (2001) results about online environments comprise that there is participants' more convenience in terms of time and place, they foster everyone's participation, they allow to access the different content as many times as desired, and learners have longer periods to reflect and then to produce.

On the other hand, the importance of online courses or web-based task along the study lies on the variety of tools it offers for students and facilitator to develop processes related to teaching pronunciation with quality results. Idea that is supported by several authors such as Nadeem, M., et al. (2012) who suggest that during the last years, it has been an increased demand with relation to technology in education as well as for English learning with pronunciation emphasis. Subsequently, Pennington, M. (1999) presents some advantages when employing Computer-Assisted Pronunciation instruction in terms of providing feedback in a faster way, the allowance for doing speech analysis as well as hearing segments unlimited. Moreover, Hişmanoğlu, (2010) cited in Mohammad Al-Qudah, F. Z. (2012) brings the concept to discussion by claiming that computer assisted materials provide teachers with several tools for pronunciation performances and practices such as sound animations, tongue twisters, phonetic descriptions, songs, videos, and some other elements for practicing segmental and suprasegmental features of pronunciation. Finally, it is accomplished that internet-based materials are currently not only technological, but also pedagogical aspects that develop improvement in pronunciation teaching and learning; in fact, it was reported how participants who were involved in computer-assisted academic environments performed better in terms of pronunciation learning than the ones who had their process in the conventional way (Mohammad Al-Qudah, F. Z., 2012).

### **Collaborative Learning**

With regards to this construct, some authors' ideas will be explored in order to define what collaborative learning refers to, some of its advantages and disadvantages with relation to educational settings, and its role in online settings and English pronunciation. In

that order, Larusson, J. A. (2010) says that “Collaborative learning emerges from the actions a learner takes when working with others” (p.3). In addition, learning as a part of cognitive functions is explained as a product of social interactions, which entails how learners are integrated or take part in knowledge communities, (Vigotsky, 1978, p.57).

Accounting for what theory says about collaborative learning, Larusson, J. A. (2010) refers to this concept (CL) as any situation in which members of a group not only strive together towards a common outcome while they increase learning effectiveness, but also become aware of how everyone plays a very important role and are responsible as part of the same team. The concept is brought to discussion again on Zhu’s, C. (2012) ideas portraying that “Collaborative learning is a social interaction that involving a community of learners and teachers, where members acquire and share experience or knowledge” (p.128). Furthermore, Brodahl, C., et al., (2011) depict that in education, performance that requires learners to do peer interaction guided by a facilitator or teacher, refers to collaborative learning. To the final extent, the concept of tutoring peers is settled, in which learners besides providing instructions to each other, more competent individuals take control of the learning over less competent participants though everybody is more willing to participate and share with their classmates (Cheong, C., 2010); subsequently, students in peer collaboration, who may not accomplish a task individually, can work together to attain the different objectives.

In the same fashion, Brindley, Walti, & Blaschke (2009) make emphasis on a collaborative approach as work units in which learners are expected to develop skills of self-reflection as well as co-construction of knowledge and meaning. Similarly Gaytan & McEwen (2007) reported that collaboration in small groups has been particularly

recognized as both advantageous and appreciated by students; besides it has been shown that small groups enable students to identify and correct misconceptions more easily and quickly and to improve understanding of the topics being studied. Some other benefits presented along collaborative learning lie on how students, who are involved in activities or projects related to the same, develop improvement on critical thinking skills, constructivism processes, and contextualizing knowledge towards real situations (Benbunan, 1997; Palloff & Pratt, 2003, cited in Moore, M. J., 2008). In addition, as cited by Zhang, L. (2009), academic environments either online or in classroom can take advantage of interactive processes as teachers and students support to each other for constructing knowledge and new world views. However, Chiong, R., & Jovanovic, J. (2012) reported that not all members may be encouraged to participate actively along the different activities, and the facilitator is required to implement appropriate strategies that actually foster learners' collaboration in the whole sense (Moore, M. J., 2008).

Nowadays, organizations are focusing on scattering the changing from individual performance to team work endeavors; thus, online collaboration is emerging as a regular practice (Chiong, R., & Jovanovic, J., 2012). Collaborative learning activities as an aspect of the social constructivism theory, have a real impact on developing knowledge construction throughout online environments (Zhu's, C., 2012). Moreover, Devante, V. et al., (2002) display different factors when online collaborative learning is taking place: reading messages, posting, annotating sections of a document, commenting briefly, writing, editing, making content changes. Moreover, Hinofotis & Bailey, 1980) stipulate some strategies that aid students working on language communicatively, namely, listening and imitation, phonetic training, minimal pair drills, contextualized minimal pairs, visual aids,

tongue twisters and developmental approximation drills.

On the same stream, distant education, specifically online, has become a tendency for global instruction as well as a social learning perspective for communities, which is reflected on technological advances such as Web 2.0 (Barriga, F., et al., 2009). Furthermore, Irumaih, A. A. (2004) suggest that “The new and recent capabilities of technology- especially the multimedia and hypermedia authoring tools and the WWW- have opened new channels to teach English through interaction and individual learning” (p.7). Subsequently, it is concluded that virtual learning communities illustrate how TICs can be applied to enhance and promote interactional learning by formal education and new educational environments (Coll, C., 2001).

Accounting for the aforementioned theory related to collaborative aspects when teaching and learning occurs in online environments, pronunciation is a language element that is likely to be developed in the same field. Hardison, D. M., (2004) states that in computer-aided pronunciation (CAP), learners have their access to their and others pronunciation performance increased through visual demonstrations, individual phonemes analyses, and examples related to isolated words or phrases. Likewise, it is suggested by Pennington, M. (1999) that “computer-aided pronunciation can be used in a range of modes combining whole-class, small-group or pair, teacher-to-student and individual work” (p.430). Finally, the author presents CAP as a medium for accessing not only to one’s performances, but also to partners’ products and speeches in order to analyze concerning pronunciation aspects, develop evaluations, and providing feedback when comparison across students’ products takes place.

## **5. Related Researches**

Research studies have been explored in order to see what literature says about pronunciation strategy use and related elements. Studies conducted in other parts of the world illustrate how language learners might have been affected by the employment of pronunciation learning strategies and other instructional practices. In the next paragraphs, some of these studies will be described.

Pronunciation learning strategies can result profitable for increasing accuracy in the production of pronunciation features, as shown in the study conducted by Ingels (2011). The researcher's goal for this study was to extend our understanding of the role of strategy use in L2 pronunciation learning by investigating the effectiveness of training future international teaching assistants (ITAs) to critically listen to, transcribe, mark corrections (annotate), and orally rehearse English suprasegmental features in their own speech. For this purpose fifteen graduate-level learners of English (14 Mandarin speakers, 1 Korean speaker) from an English as a Second Language (ESL) pronunciation class at a Midwestern university were asked to participate in a repeated-measures design, in which participants had to use in combination strategies of critical listening, transcription, annotation and rehearsal. Speech data resulting from strategy use were gathered at the beginning and end of a 16-week semester in order to determine the extent to which strategy use corresponded to improved suprasegmental accuracy. The author found that all participants accomplished meaningful advances in the suprasegmental aspects of the language, specially stress and connected speech. Thus, concluding that to train learners to use PLS such as critical listening, transcription and rehearsing correction aloud proved to be effective to increase pronunciation accuracy. Besides, this study provided the first empirical evidence for the

practicality of the annotation phase as a strategy for further boosting pronunciation accuracy.

On the other hand, other researchers have addressed pronunciation in their studies and whether it can be positively impacted by different learning scenarios and approaches. As an example Goswami and Chen (2008) examined whether collaborative learning structures make a significant impact on ELL subjects' overall pronunciation of target English sounds. The study enrolled 44 English language learners from a high school in Mexico, who ranged in age from fifteen to nineteen years old; all students' native language was Spanish, as spoken in Mexico, and they all performed at similar levels of English fluency, as determined by the school's criteria. Participants were divided into two groups, one of 25 students that received instruction in a conventional classroom setting, and other consisting of 19 students, received instruction on CSG whose instruction included collaborative learning elements such as positive interdependence, individual accountability, face-to-face interaction and group processing. Instructions regarding features of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) such as places of articulation and manners of articulation were also presented to this group in a collaborative learning structure. To collect the data, researchers administered a pre-test of the pronunciation of the target sounds to all the participants in both the collaborative and conventional study groups. After all the phonetic features of the target sounds were presented in the phonetic and phonological instruction, a post-test was given to both groups in the identical format as in the pre-test. Subjects' phonetic realizations of the target consonants were audio taped and video recorded during both tests for assessment purposes. The researchers concluded that phonetic and phonological instruction did significantly improve subjects' pronunciation of

target English sounds in both the collaborative and the conventional study groups, and both groups obtained statistically significant improvement over the period of the study. However, the difference in progress between these two groups was not statistically significant. Thus, investigators concluded that for collaborative learning structures to be successfully implemented in ESL classrooms, the essential elements of CSG need to be present for a successful outcome. Positive interdependence, individual accountability, face-to-face interaction, social skills and group processing need to be built in the instructional format and materials creatively and effectively. Next, adequate time for instruction and “fermentation” of collaborative learning elements is definitely needed for the implementation of collaborative learning strategies.

## **6. Methodology**

During this section, the type of research, study, methods, setting, participants, role adopted by the researchers, ethical issues, and the pedagogical intervention, which are aspects that aim to frame the paper, will be presented not only by considering theory, but also by accounting for its relation with the target process.

### **6.1. Type of Research**

The specific type of research implemented along the process was qualitative research. With regards to this, and considering Fraentel & Wallen’s (1996) ideas on the matter, qualitative research is quite pertinent to this study on the grounds that it seeks to present results related to a specific phenomenon, which in this case is the implementation of online collaborative study groups when teaching and learning pronunciation occurs;



moreover, and considering theory, the study took place in the setting where the interested phenomena emerged, the data collection methods were in form of words (interviews and researcher's journal), and it emphasized on participants' products, feelings, and perceptions.

## **6.2. Type of Study**

This research was conducted as a case study due to the fact that it aimed to collect information of a specific population (students from a course of English pronunciation II) involved in a particular phenomenon (online collaborative study groups) by considering different sources; such as, interviews, artifacts, and journals. Ideas supported by Margarete et al. (2010) who claim that case study is the process of collecting detailed information about participants from different perspectives in order to analyze variables that may occur when working with human beings. Additionally, she suggests that case studies entail some particular individuals within a group of a given context or setting to be the focus of study. And finally, Merriam's ideas (1998) cited in Margarete et al. (2010) portray that case studies are characterized for a limit to the number of people involved.

In the same stream, this was a descriptive study inasmuch as it provided descriptive information related to how students from a course of English pronunciation developed in online collaborative study groups; hence, what the process was all along the different stages (Merriam, 2002). Finally, it was also an interpretative study on the grounds that based on the collected information, analysis, and conclusions were portrayed to the final extent mainly in terms of pronunciation teaching in online collaborative group work (Creswell,

2007).

### **6.3. Context**

The research was developed at a public university of Pereira, Risaralda. This university is located in the village of “La Julita” in the southeast of the city. The academic programs of the university include undergraduate and graduate courses. In this sense, the university serves students of all social classes and the mission functions intends the promotion of competent professionals to service in public and private areas of society. It is a high-quality university in the region for its competitiveness, research, and innovation. On the other hand, within the undergraduate courses, the English Language teaching program is included, which currently has an average population of 700 students, and it seeks to train learners to be proficient teachers in English language.

### **6.4. Setting**

The English Language program comprises in its P.E.I (U.T.P., 2013) a vision that prompts professionals to implement new pedagogical strategies in terms of teaching a foreign language, to become leaders in the field. The program also implements international standards in its educational labor. With regards to the professors; currently, there are 26 teachers and only 2 are assigned for teaching the subject of pronunciation. The professors’ professional studies lie on undergraduate and graduate degrees mainly in the area of education, humanities, and language teaching. Accounting for the course of pronunciation particularly, it is 3 hours per week, and there are different groups of pronunciation I and pronunciation II which number of students are around 35 in each course.

## **6.5. Participants**

The participants involved in the research project were gathered from two courses of pronunciation II. Here, two groups from each course were selected, each group was composed by four students in order to establish an overall of 16 students studied. Thus, the professor in charge of the class who also owns the project allowed participants to comfort their groups after explaining the purpose of the study. On the other hand, the population comprised both women and men from different social status and whose ages range from 19 to 31 years old. Finally, accounting for their English level, it was shown that though some participants might have a higher level of the language, the average lied on A2. On the same line, the use of a reading aloud strategy in which all the participants had to read an A.2 text about Alice in Wonderland at the beginning of the research study in order to portray appraisal on students' pronunciation performance in terms of word stress, linking words, vowel sounds, and intonation. After recording learners' reading and analyzing the prior mentioned patterns, it was found that, from the population involved in the process, most of them presented L2 interference in terms of accent, there was lacking of appropriate word stress when facing unknown words such as “considering, remarkable, afterwards”, some issues related to ed-endings “peeped, looked” and linking words “thought it over” were noticed, and different students presented mistakes while pronouncing several vowel sounds.

## **6.6. Data collection Methods**

The different methods that were implemented for collecting the data are: Interviews (see appendix 1), researcher's journals, and artifacts. With regards to interviews, Fraentel & Wallen (1996), present ideas on the matter by suggesting that interviewing is a method that

allows the researcher to check, refute, or verify information related to the observations as well as to the different aspects involved in the phenomenon of study that may not be noticed directly. Consequently, this method was significant to the process inasmuch as it provided data associated to participants' feelings and opinions. In the same stream, an informal interview, which contained opinion and perception questions, was developed with the students of pronunciation at the end of the study.

The second instrument employed in the process was the researcher's journals. In this sense, Hall (2002) states that "personal journals are documents produced by the researcher in which he or she records his or her feelings and reflections" (p.165). Additionally, the author claims that journals are divided into two sections, the first one in which the researcher comprises detailed information about significant incidents, and the second one, in which the researcher reflects and portrays reactions towards these events. Subsequently, the usage of personal journals in the study was quite pertinent to the same on the grounds that they provided documentation of the different aspects taking place about the interest phenomenon such as performances and behaviors (Hall, J. 2002). With regards to the implementation, this process was developed per week accounting for any affair (students reactions, design of the activities, external factors) related to the focus of inquiry.

Finally, artifacts were considered in the research project on the grounds that as Halverson et al. (2011) present, artifacts serve as means of communication between teaching and learning or designers and users; additionally, the author concludes that artifacts entail in their functions to begin, compound, or assess processes. Examples of the latter are settled by Carter, C. et al. (2003); such as, books, articles, outlines, videos, films, simulations, and transcripts. For these reasons, artifacts were important to the study

accounting for the researchers' role and efforts to analyze participants' products while they performed along the process. In this order, at the end of the study, any type of students' performance related to the interested phenomenon ought be analyzed and reflected in depth.

### **6.7. Data Analysis**

From the data collected, relevant information has been coded to facilitate the data analysis and presentation of it. The codes used were as follow: I: interview, G: group, RJ: researcher's journal, #: number of group, ON: observation notes/artifacts, and S: student. Some examples are given bellow.

ONG1	This code indicates that the information has been taken from the observation notes, group #1.
IG2S4	This code indicates that the information was taken from the interviewed conducted with the Group 2, and the answers given by student # 4
RJ	This code indicates that the information was taken form one of the researchers' journals

### **6.8. Researchers' role**

In order for this study be conducted appropriately in terms of information management, different considerations were included along the process. First of all, all participants who were willing to take part in the study were aware of the process aimed by the researchers; likewise, participants were requested to sign a consent form regarding the

different labors intended to be developed in the research process, where it was also highlighted that the purpose of the same, is not beyond professional and academically issues (see appendix 5). On the other hand, and accounting for the institution and settings, the usage of pseudonyms and codes were implemented in order to protect the integrity of every individual involved along the study.

In this case study, the researchers were observers as well as participants. Here, all the students were aware of being observed by the researchers with the purpose of collecting information mainly; subsequently, Adler and Adler, (1998) cited in Merriam, S.B. (2009), explain that “the researcher may have access to many people in a wide range of information, but the level of the information revealed is controlled by the group members being investigated” (p.124). Moreover, in the study researchers were involved in the process of designing activities and online collaborative tasks including pronunciation teaching and learning strategies. However, researchers as well as teachers’ labor were not beyond of the necessary advising and proposals required due to the fact that that it was students who independently accessed and performed the activities on the platform. In this sense, Fraentel, J. & Wallen, N. (1996) claim that when rolling observer as participant, researcher is not intended to take place in the activities or in the phenomenon of study directly; and eventually, he or she remains for the participants as an interested observer who is doing research.

## **6.9. Pedagogical intervention**

Regarding the pedagogical intervention, it will be explored how the pedagogical strategy, in this case online collaborative group work, was developed. Prior to the actual

appliance, students were required to make the groups they were willing to work with; then, the professor of the course provided some input related to the use of pronunciation learning strategies (reading-aloud, tongue twisters, self-recordings, karaoke, etc) among which participants had to select 5 per group for them to develop each week implementing a sequence model for learning pronunciation (sequence adapted from Pronunciation Strategy Taxonomy Developed by Eckstein 2007, p. 35; cited in Ingels, 2011; see figure 1.). On the same line, the sequence required students to perform along a cycle that comprises input, practice, noticing, and output. The first stage that students did was the creation of the online community, which they did on facebook (facebook private groups), and google community (+ tu). Moreover, each group had the chance to decide the order for implementing the pronunciation strategies.

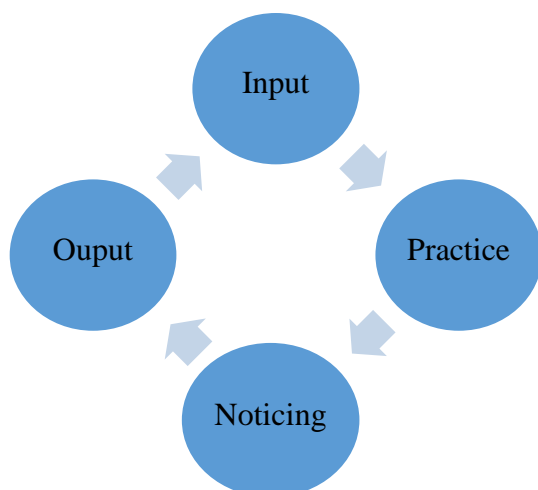
Practicing pronunciation was participants' next labor. After having created the online groups, learners began to apply the strategies they selected from the list. In this sense, "karaoke", a strategy that can be used to imitate suprasegmental features of pronunciation, was implemented for students to listen several words and sentences in order to imitate by attempting to reach the patterns established on the song; hence, the strategy helped to correct pronunciation issues especially in terms of intonation and stress, since the participants recorded themselves twice, the first for receiving feedback from their peers, and the second rehearsing the activity based on the peers' comments. Moreover, another strategy that was used for producing or practicing was "Reading aloud", which allows voice recording processes while seeing the text that is being read, and according to Eckstein, (2007) cited in Ingels, (2011) reading aloud helps learners monitoring L2 performance, as well as acquiring sounds. Finally, a different pronunciation learning strategy that Eckstein,

(2007) cited in Ingels (2011) set as a source of "helping facial muscles become accustomed to accommodating L2 pronunciation Practicing different sounds" (p.17) is the "tongue twister", which learners also implemented on the online study groups by recording themselves while developing this strategy focusing on specific sounds. Subsequently, every strategy used for students' production was uploaded on the Facebook group, and on google + in which all the groups' participants were enrolled in collaborative endeavors such as providing feedback to their peers, commenting, and posting. In addition to this, and taking advantage of the prior collaborative process, participants raise awareness on the different mistakes committed in terms of pronunciation when producing; additionally, Eckstein, (2007) cited in Ingels, (2011) portrays that "distinguishing errors among others' speakers and acquiring general knowledge of phonetics" (p. 37) prompt participants to notice language patterns in learning pronunciation.

The process itself required Learners rehearsed previous activities taking into account the analysis developed through the feedback, and entering into a cycle of producing and analyzing, every participant practiced, collaborated with his/her peers, and reflected on the process over and over concerning the different activities involved in pronunciation learning strategies . On the other hand, after developing all the stages up to now including the collaborative feedback, the apprentices were at the point in which they could achieve improvement in their speech's pronunciation, as (Eckstein 2007, pag. 35) cited by Ingels (2011) states, "repeating new words according to new hypotheses, skipping difficult words, rehearsing sounds, using proximal articulations, increasing or decreasing volume of speech, using a slower rate of speech, and using clear speech lowering anxiety" (pag. 18).



**Figure 1**



### **6.10. Ethical Considerations**

In order for this study be conducted appropriately in terms of information management, different considerations were included along the process. First of all, all participants who were willing to take part in the study were aware of the process aimed by the researchers; likewise, participants were requested to sign a consent form regarding the different labors intended to be developed in the research process, where it was also highlighted that the purpose of the same, is not beyond professional and academically issues. On the other hand, and accounting for the institution and settings, the usage of pseudonyms and codes were implemented in order to protect the integrity of every individual involved along the study.

## **7. Findings**

Based on the research process, results related to student's feedback, interaction patterns, autonomy work, and pronunciation performance will be presented and considered in detail.

### **7.1. Feedback: a delicate process in collaborative study groups**

Feedback was certainly one of the core elements researched in the present study. Consequently, this finding will be discussed considering how participants provided feedback to each other; the type of feedback evidenced in the OCSGs' participants, the students' perceptions towards feedback, and the common features which feedback was provided on. Each of them will be described and interpreted.

#### **7.1.1 The type of feedback evidenced in the OCSGs: positive reinforcement**

The following excerpts, taken from the observation notes illustrate how students' online collaborative feedback was something that participants did mostly by means of positive comments on each other's tasks. This shows that learners involved in the process were constantly praising their peers' production.

ONG1

*"Nice voice and great work... Congratulations your work it's very good / great work Sebas / Great job!"*

*"Good Job, I think you do it very well / I love your voice, amazing job"*

This suggest that even though the contributions made by students when providing feedback to partners right after they had completed a task were mostly focused on encouraging and congratulating participants and their work. Perhaps these positive comments were intended to motivate learners to continue practicing.

The excerpt presented below, taken from the researchers' journals shows that even when participants provided some genuine feedback on aspects of pronunciation, especially

on how to correct specific language sounds, they still mainly focused on praising their partners' work. Apparently this happened due to the fact that students did not really know how to offer comments that could actually contribute to error correction and improvement.

*RJ – April 08<sup>th</sup>*

*“... it is evidenced how students despite giving some actual language focused analysis, especially on segmental features of pronunciation, they mainly aim to praise or advise their partners on their products ... it seems that learners may be aware of the mistakes made by their partners, but they might not know how to provide appropriate feedback”*

It is important to mention that participants in OCSGs did not really receive any previous instruction or training on how to appropriately deliver feedback on pronunciation. The data suggests that even though our learners attend a university and even have a good level of English proficiency, it seems that most of the time they were not really able to go further than providing positive comments to the group members after presenting tasks. Hence, participants sought continually to encourage and motivate their partners by means of emphatic observations on everyone's work.

Furthermore, the following excerpt taken from the interviewed conducted with the students involved in the present study, shows how even when feedback generally focused on giving positive reinforcement every time classmates posted pronunciation tasks on the platform, it was evidenced how these simple observations certainly motivated them to continue practicing English pronunciation.

*“Cosas buenas el hecho de hacer un trabajo de estrategias de pronunciación y que las suba en línea y que los compañeros te lo comenten ayuda mucho a mejorar, que uno pueda como integrarse con los comentarios nos ayuda a mejorar, hasta esos comentarios sencillos de (good job) y así, como que lo alentaban a uno”*

This led us to believe that positive reinforcement, as simple as it could be, in one way or another truly stimulated participants' enthusiasm to continue to participate actively in the OCSGs. Additionally, this showed how by merely commenting something positive about someone who made an effort to produce something, may actually help students to be more eager towards learning.

This finding concurs with what Jennifer L. Diedrich (2010) reported on how praising participants' efforts when learning a new skill effectively promoted the desired behavior. Additionally, this is complemented by Kitty Campbell et al. (2014) who concluded in his study that positive reinforcement on participant's labors not only inhibited undesirable feelings, but it generated a good attitude towards the goal. Consequently, although the process of peer correction in OCSGs did not focus on segmental and suprasegmental features of pronunciation all the time, and despite participants' lack of training on how to provide actual language feedback, both of the previous studies provide strong support on how positive comments as reinforcement given by participants in the research project, may have encouraged learners to continue practicing English pronunciation.

### 7.1.2 Perceptions towards feedback – Affective filter

Another important issue that the present study displayed was how some participants reported feeling uncomfortable addressing their partners' perceived mistakes related to pronunciation features as they had a sense of inferiority in relation to those who they considered to have a stronger command of the L2. The following excerpt show this:

IG2S8

*“... y pues por parte mía, no les daba feedback a ninguno porque yo no me sentía en la capacidad ni en la condición para hacerlo, si ellos que que... yo considero que ellos saben más que yo y pues a veces ponía que estaba bien, que que cambiaban una cosa y esto, y pues, realmente no sentía que podía aportar...”*

This supports the idea of how lack of confidence may have affected individuals' willingness when they were required to evaluate their peers' pronunciation performance critically. Therefore, and considering how some learners could have perceived themselves not skillful enough in the language to provide feedback, it can be said that they felt uncomfortable posting comments on the OCSGs, especially in cases of those students' work who they acknowledged to be more proficient in English.

In the following excerpt taken from our journal, we reflect that one of the reasons why students did not post many comments on perceived errors in their partners' production, was because of their fear of making them upset.

*RJ – April 20<sup>th</sup>*

*“... it seems that participants might have noticed some of their partners' mistakes,*

*but they rather not mention them to avoid uncomfortable situations”*

This suggests that one of the factors that influenced participants to just focus on giving positive comments instead of emphasizing on error correction, had to do with how learners might have been trying to avoid generating any type of discomfort in their partners, taking into account that even well intended error correction may not be received in a positive way, and might instead create conflict among the group members.

Additionally, the following excerpts from the observation notes show evidence on how participants continually gave encouraging comments on each other's production, recognizing and addressing not only language aspects, but also very simple things like the participants' voice while performing. Very few negative comments were seen on the platform.

*ONG1*

*“Good Job, you have a very pleasant tone of voice and your pronunciation is really good”*

*“Nice job, I could hear some connected speech as linking, contractions and reduction”*

It might be implied from the data that participants considered their partners' feelings when it came to providing comments on their products. Besides, it seems that an actual sense of caring among the group members was always preserved, so that even when students could have made comments related to mistakes made on pronunciation, they appeared to give priority to the best aspects of their production.

This finding is supported by Harrison (2017) who showed that although giving feedback is essential to promote learning, participants who receive it tend to have adverse feelings, especially when it involves pointing out errors. Pozen R. C (2013) sheds light on the same idea by stating how negative feedback, when not done properly, it is likely to generate strong undesirable effects on individuals' performance. Our data revealed that participants' feelings were a major factor when giving feedback in OCSGs. It seemed that students were concerned about their partners' reactions to negative posts even when they might not intent to harm. As a result, they abstained from mentioning possible mistakes presented during the process, just to avoid triggering negative feelings.

### **7.1.3 Common features on which feedback was provided**

The feedback given to address participant's errors while they were performing pronunciation tasks on the online platform, focused mainly on segmental features of the language. The following interview shows that participants consciously focused attention on correcting errors related to specific phonemes.

IG3S2

*“Pues los compañeros me decían que estaba mal, entonces yo ya trataba para la próxima actividad mejorar esa parte en la que tenía falencias, más que todo en la pronunciación de palabras y sonidos que me parecían difíciles”*

It can be said that participants' feedback on some of their classmates' production focused on correcting particular sounds of the L2. This shows how some learners tried to help their peers to correct their mistakes by means of identifying phonemes that were being mispronounced. Hence, students could benefit from each other's comments as a tool to

foster pronunciation learning.

The following excerpt from the researcher's journal appears to present word stress as another aspect which feedback was targeted on. Here, the evidence shows how through the use of the IPA, participants seemed to focus not only on specific language sounds but also on how to stress the word appropriately.

*RJ – February 25<sup>th</sup>*

*“... The group is providing comments more related to the actual objective of the pronunciation project, rather than only enjoying the use of the platform thought the pronunciation strategy, in this sense, they complement their observations with feedback related to participants' performance: “I just found – baby, you pronounce / 'beɪbɪ / ...”*

This shows that whereas students' feedback focused mostly on segmental features of pronunciation, word stress was also considered. It is important to remember that the participants were aware of the aim of the study in terms of providing feedback on diverse pronunciation issues. Hence, they needed to focus not only on phonemes being mispronounced, but also on different pronunciation phenomena that to them, may have required correction.

The final aspect that we identified when learners provided feedback to their peers, was a very specific suprasegmental aspect of pronunciation named linking. The following excerpt taken from the observation notes shows that some of the participants commented on how some words can be connected when pronounced in order to improve the learner's speech.



## ONGI

*“It was good Caro. You need to improve you fluency in the comments, if you practice it can help you, and also remember that you can connect some words to sound better, for example / at all /”*

This suggests that students intended to advise each other on how to improve their speech for future interventions by identifying common words that can be linked while speaking. Moreover, it is significant to mention that to link words correctly, the learner needs some time and practice with the language. However, the idea of addressing particular words that could have been connected during the development of the activity eventually contributes to overcoming possible difficulties with pronunciation.

This finding is related to Muhammad (2014) who reported that it is very common for English learners to face difficulties when pronouncing vowels and consonants. The participants in the present research, who were still learning English, and who needed to develop and post different tasks focused on pronunciation practice, were likely to make mistakes on segmental features of the language, which by following the project procedure, they tried to correct by giving feedback to each other. Yates (2012) quoted by Mirza, H. (2015) complements the present finding when remarking that intonation, linking, rhythm, and stress are aspects of pronunciation that need to be considered to develop a good intelligibility. It is necessary to mention that OCSGs offered an opportunity for students to practice and then foster learning, and even when they did not focus very much on suprasegmental features of the language during the implementation of the project, they did try to approach them at a basic level when advising each other as well as offering

corrections on some simple aspects of their practices regarding linking and word stress

## **7.2. The role of autonomy in online study groups: self-directed learning and self-regulation**

OCSGs was a project which required participants to be the main actors in the process. They needed to take responsibility for their own learning and practice since each of them were in charge of producing, uploading, and providing feedback on the different tasks posted on the platform.

One of the key factors evidenced on the present research was the participants' sense of autonomy when required to complete the different pronunciation activities, to post them on the platform, and to comment to give feedback to their peers. The platform itself and the characteristics of an online website allowed students to do their tasks without any constraints in terms of time and place; hence, they were the ones to command and direct their own learning to fulfill the different goals in the project. This excerpt taken from one of the researches journals shows this.

*RJ - March 13*

*“In terms of students’ performances of the different activities, it is noticed how learners upload their products without considering any sequences or deadlines. Subsequently, participants are taking advantage of the freedom portrayed in online environments when it comes to develop their learning process autonomously and with no restrictions or limits to how, when, or where to do it, and yet they manage to coordinate and accomplish their academic objectives”*

This passage shows how participants took advantage of OCSGs as a tool that offered the opportunity of free practice. It is important to mention that the only things learners needed for the activities were a laptop and internet access. Students were given the chance of producing from almost anywhere and at any moment, and even when they might not be used to performing in uncontrolled environments, they took full responsibility for their learning and still managed to comply with the different pronunciation tasks required for the project.

Participants used a variety of tools for the pronunciation tasks:

- Self-recordings, where participants used the regular windows voice recorder to post tongue twisters and do some reading.
- Movenote, where they created videos and presentations while reading some texts and practicing with minimal pairs.
- Videos uploaded to YouTube or to the platform for the karaoke.

This is to say that participants fulfilled the objectives of the project through the use of tools they selected themselves. It is significant to mention that students were not given any specific instruction on how to post their tasks or what to use for them, but they needed to find their own way and agree on how to do this. Making use of the autonomy given, learners seemed to have easily found the tools they felt most comfortable with, in this case windows voice-recorder, Movenote, and videos.

The following excerpt taken from the interview shows that some students reported having a need for authority or at least someone who could control and guide the process. Apparently, there was a tendency to consider social networks as something to entertain and

not for academic issues.

#### *IGIS4*

*“...sí, es normal que hayan sucedido estos inconvenientes, pero sí debería haber más presencia como de una autoridad, aunque sea en línea pero que alguien esté controlando más, sí porque uno tiende a ser irresponsable, y uno ve las redes sociales y el internet, bueno al menos yo, más como entretenimiento, y no como para hacer cosas serias”*

This sheds light on the idea that some of the students were in need of a person to be in charge of the project, someone to be a leader, who could control the learning environment. This also suggests that Facebook, which is a social network used commonly for entertaining, could have affected students' sense of responsibility when they needed to post tasks on time. It is also significant to say that perhaps some of the participants were not used to working on online environments and on their own; hence, they felt this necessity of having someone with “authority” controlling the process.

This finding concords with Nielsen, H. L. (2012) who explains how autonomy is the responsibility learners take for their learning and every decision that this entails. In OCSGs learners were empowered to perform the pronunciation activities by being the protagonists of their learning. They needed to find the tools for their tasks, they had to post the activities on time, and they were required to provide feedback on mistakes made by their peers. On the other hand, Esmaili, Z. et al's (2015) ideas about students' concern about being noticed and addressed by the teacher in learning environments are similar to what some participants reported in OCSGs, as they claimed to have needed a person with authority

involved in the process. In the end, and even with students lack of experience in online learning environments, they succeeded in doing it all by themselves. They achieved the objectives established in the project, and they did it without any type of supervision or external control.

### **7.3. Phonological awareness: the impact of OCSGs on English pronunciation**

The following excerpt taken from the interview shows how students who participated in OCSGs, where they needed to post pronunciation tasks constantly, provide feedback on each other's production, and take these corrections into consideration for future practice, reported to have learned and improved their pronunciation.

*IG1S2*

*“Yo pienso que estuvo muy bien, y pues, también hay que mirar el lado positivo, de que cada uno aprendió, mejoró, que era por el objetivo que íbamos, por mejorar.*

This illustrates how students who participated in OCSGs eventually improved their pronunciation. Here, it is necessary to mention that it was a three-month project, where learners posted a great variety of tasks, and each of them was focused on pronunciation practice. Likewise, participants helped each other to correct their mistakes by identifying errors on each other's tasks. Therefore, it can be said that learners were involved in a project which fostered constant practice on pronunciation and hence improvement on this particular speaking subskill.

Students implemented a variety of pronunciation strategies as means to practice English pronunciation. These strategies were reading aloud, tongue twisters, minimal pairs,

phoneme-focused reading, podcasting, and karaoke. The following excerpt taken from the observation notes shows this.

*ONG1234*

*Group 1: reading aloud, tongue twisters, video recordings, phoneme-focused reading, and karaoke.*

*Group 2: tongue twisters, karaoke, minimal pairs, podcasting, reading aloud*

*Group 3: karaoke, reading aloud, minimal pairs, tongue twisters*

*Group 4: karaoke, video recordings, reading aloud, tongue twisters.*

This suggests that students took advantage of the different pronunciation tools offered for practice. Learners were given the opportunity of selecting their own pronunciation strategies to do their tasks and then post them on the platform. Here, it is worth mentioning that there was a group tendency to implement some specific strategies like karaoke, reading aloud, and tongue twisters. This was perhaps due to the fact that these strategies could have been the ones they felt more comfortable with. In the end, the strategies used by the groups had the same purpose of practicing and improving English pronunciation.

It was observed that participants improved their pronunciation by providing feedback to one another, and by taking this feedback into consideration for future practice. The following excerpt taken from our journal shows this.

*RJ – April 13*

*Regarding students' performance during this week, it is being evidenced that they have started to notice their partners' weaknesses on pronunciation. Also, they have accepted positively the comments given by their peers, uploading the task again and correcting the mistakes made previously.*

This led us to consider that participants in OCSGs seemed to have overcome difficulties with pronunciation by providing and receiving feedback. First, learners posted their tasks, and then they received some comments on errors of pronunciation. Taking into account these corrections given by their peers for future production appeared to have been the key for improving pronunciation and achieve stronger communicative skills.

This finding concords with Nurani, Siti & Rosyada, Amrina. (2015) who concluded that reading aloud activities were successful in improving English pronunciation of adult ESL learners. Likewise, Rengifo A.'s (2009) study suggested that provided good practice to enhance students' pronunciation as they were highly motivated practicing the language with music. In OCSGs students were required to practice pronunciation by performing a series of tasks using strategies like karaoke, reading aloud, minimal pairs, and others. Therefore, it can be said that in the end of the project, learners improved their pronunciation in the L2.

## **8. Pedagogical implications**

A number of different findings presented in the study show that OCSGs can contribute to the field of teaching and learning English as a second language.

It has been seen that some English teachers, for different reasons do not give enough attention to teaching English pronunciation; hence, one alternative to make up for this could be the implementation of CCSGs. Here, taking advantage of technology, participants could not only work on their own outside the classroom but also work as a team to help each other improve English pronunciation.

Technology is something that continues to enter more and more into the field of English teaching and learning. It has also been noticed that some of our students prefer working with technology to sitting in a traditional classroom. This led us to consider OCSGs, where participants only need a computer and the internet, as a means to provide a space where students feel more comfortable to perform pronunciation activities and continue to learn.

We also recommend that if anyone is to implement OCSGs as tools where learners need to use collaborative learning to improve their English pronunciation, previous training on how to provide feedback on specific language aspects and on how to do this without upsetting their peers, is likely to produce better results.

Finally, another aspect to take into consideration when implementing OCSGs has to do with the selection of tools like programs, platform, and devices that students will use. It is true that some students can be very good at using technology, but there may be cases where learners struggle using it. Hence, we advise either giving some previous training on how to use the platform and the programs, or simply allowing students to use the ones they are familiar with.



## 9. Conclusion

We conducted a case study involving sixteen students enrolled in a pronunciation course forming part of an English teacher preparation program at a public university in Pereira. These students were involved in an online study group using Facebook. The participants posted pronunciation tasks based on learning pronunciation strategies like reading aloud, karaoke, minimal pairs, tongue twisters, and making recordings for their peers (to analyze mistakes made and provide feedback on segmental and suprasegmental features). In the end, we found that:

Participants involved in Online Collaborative Study Groups reported having improved their English pronunciation by means of constant practicing and posting of pronunciation tasks. Additionally, learners benefited from each other's feedback due to the fact that almost all the members of the group were continually identifying pronunciation mistakes in each other's work in order to perform better and improve their speech. Consequently, we consider that OCSGs are tools for the development of pronunciation and learning.

Although learners' comments on their partners' pronunciation tasks focused on segmental and suprasegmental features, participants generally praised their peers by congratulating their work rather than by addressing specific language aspects. It seems that this happened because of students' sense of inferiority towards those who they acknowledged to be better language users, because of participants fear of making their partners upset, and because of the lack of previous training on how to provide language-oriented feedback.

Moreover, taking advantage of online environments and the use of internet, the members of OCSGs reported having benefitted from the ease of accessing computers and the web in order to perform pronunciation tasks, provide feedback, and accomplish other objectives of the project.

We also concluded that even when the participants of OCSGs could not have been used to working in uncontrolled academic environments, they still managed to take full responsibility for their own learning process, in order to do the pronunciation tasks, provide feedback as needed, and eventually comply with all the requirements of the study.

## 10. References

- Rengifo, A. (2009). Improving Pronunciation through the Use Of Karaoke in an Adult English Class. *PROFILE* 11, 2009. ISSN 1657-0790. Bogotá, Colombia. Pages 91-105
- Nurani, Siti & Rosyada, Amrina. (2015). Improving English Pronunciation of adult ESL Learners through Reading Aloud Assessments. *Lingua Cultura*. Vol. 9 No, 2.
- Esmaeili, Z. et al. (2015). The Role of Teacher's Authority in Students' Learning. *Journal of Education and Practice*. Vol. 6 No, 19.
- Nielsen, H. L. (2012). E-learning and the Dilemma of Learner Autonomy: A Case Study of First Year University Students of Arabic. *Orientalia Suecana LXI Suppl.*
- Mirza, H. (2015). ESL and EFL Learners Improve Differently in Pronunciation: The Case of Lebanon. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 199. 486 – 495
- Muhammad, E. (2014). Pronunciation Problems: A Case Study of English Language Students at Sudan University of Science and Technology. *English Language and Literature Studies*; Vol. 4, No. 4

Pozen R. C (2013). The Delicate Art of Giving Feedback. Harvard Business Review.  
March 18

Harrison, S. (2017). How to Dive and Receive Feedback about Creative Work. Harvard  
Business Review. November 13

Kitty Campbell et al. (2014). The Sandwich Feedback Method – Not very Tasty. Journal of  
Behavioral Studies. Volume 7. September

Jennifer L. Diedrich (2010). Motivating Students Using Positive Reinforcement. Education  
and Human Development Master's Theses. 9.

Creswell, J. W. (2007). Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods  
Approaches. London: Sage Publications.

Sharan B. Merriam (2002). Introduction to Qualitative Research. Retrieved From  
[http://media.wiley.com/product\\_data/excerpt/56/07879589/0787958956.pdf](http://media.wiley.com/product_data/excerpt/56/07879589/0787958956.pdf)

Fraentel, J. & Wallen, N. (1996). How to Design and Evaluate Research in Education.

McGraw, Inc. United States, p. 441-465

Margarete, G. et al. (2010). *Methods in Educational Research*. Jossey Bass. San Francisco, p. 24-43

UTP, (2013). *Proyecto Educativo de Programa de la Licenciatura en Lengua Inglesa*. Pereira, Risaralda.

Hall, J. (2002). *Teaching and Researching Language and Culture*. Applied Linguistics in Action Series.

Sharan B. Merriam (2009). *Qualitative Research a Guide to Design and Implement*. Jossay-Bass.

Ingels, S. (2011). *The Effects of Self-Monitoring Strategy Use on the Pronunciation of Learners of English*. Urbana, Illinois.

Carter, C., C.; Levin, J., A. & Parisi, J. (2003). *Artifacts of Knowledge and Practice in University Teaching and Learning*. American Educational Research Association

(AERA), Chicago. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Halverson, R. & Rosenfeld, H., E. (2011). Education as Design for Learning. A Model for Integrating Education Inquiry across Research Traditions. Education as Design for Learning.

Zambrano, B. & Perez, M. (2013). Aprendizaje Autorregulado a través de la Plataforma Virtual Moodle: Educación y Educadores 16(1). P.1-200. Chía, Colombia.

Coll, C. (2001). Las Comunidades De Aprendizaje Y El Futuro De La Educación: El Punto De Vistadel Fórum Universal De Las Culturas. Universidad de Barcelona

*Brodahl, C. et. al. (2011) "Collaborative Writing with Web 2.0 Technologies: Education Students' Perceptions". Journal of Information Technology Education: Innovations in Practice, Volume 10.*

Zhu, C. (2012). Student Satisfaction, Performance, and Knowledge Construction in Online Collaborative learning. *Journal of Educational Technology & Society*, 15(1), 127-n/a. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.utp.edu.co/docview/1287024903?accountid=45809>

Pennington, M. (1999). Computer-aided Pronunciation Pedagogy: Promise, Limitations and Directions. *Computer Assisted Language Learning* 12:427-440

Nadeem, M., Mohsin, M. N., Mohsin, M. S., & Hussain, K. (2012). Use of Computer Assisted Language Learning in Improving Pronunciation among Perspective Teachers. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Contemporary Research in Business*, 4(1), 580-597. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.utp.edu.co/docview/1029925549?accountid=45809>

Hardison, D. M. (2004). Generalization of Computer-assisted Prosody Training: Quantitative and Qualitative Findings. *Language Learning & Technology*, 8, 34-52.

Mohammad Al-Qudah, F. Z. (2012). Improving English Pronunciation through Computer-assisted Programs in Jordanian Universities. *Journal of College Teaching & Learning (Online)*, 9(3), 201. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.utp.edu.co/docview/1418715812?accountid=45809>

Liu, Y. (2008). The Effectiveness of Integrating Commercial Pronunciation Software into an ESL Pronunciation Class. (Order No. 1461875, Iowa State University). *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*, 89. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.utp.edu.co/docview/288207668?accountid=45809>. (288207668).

Cheong, C. (2010). From Group-based learning to Cooperative Learning: A Metacognitive Approach to Project-based Group Supervision. *Informing Science: the International Journal of an Emerging Transdiscipline*. Vol 13.

Pourshossein, A., P., Ahmadi, M., R., (2011). Why is Pronunciation so Difficult to Learn?  
Canadian Center of Science and Education. Vol. 4, No. 3; September.

Gholami, V., Moghaddam, M., M., (2013). Pronunciation Teaching and Higher Order  
Thinking Processes. European Journal of Education and Learning. Vol 14, 2013.

Tooley et al., (2003). The Massachusetts Institute of Technology information Technologies  
and International Development. *Improving English pronunciation: An Automated  
Instructional Approach*. Vol. 1, No 1, fall 2003, 75-84.

Hartshorn, K., J. (2006). *Pronunciation Matters: English Consonant Production by AUAP  
Students*. Asia University Publication CELE Journal.

He, L. (2011). Metacognition in EFL Pronunciation Learning among Chinese Tertiary  
Learners. Remmin University of China. Vol. 21, Nos 1 & 2, pp. 1-27.

Harmer, J. (2011). The Practice of English Language Teaching. Person Longman.

Vygotsky, Lev (1978). Mind in Society. London: Harvard University Press.

Larusson, J. A. (2010). Supporting the "Collaborative" Part of Wiki-mediated Collaborative  
Learning Activities. (Order No. 3403337, Brandeis University). *ProQuest  
Dissertations and Theses*, 410-n/a. Retrieved from



<http://ezproxy.utp.edu.co/docview/366376150?accountid=45809>. (366376150).

Moore, M. J. (2008). Collaborative Learning and Ethics in Online Courses: In Search of Instructional Techniques that Promote Ethical Behavior. (Order No. 3315221, Capella University). *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*, 199-n/a. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.utp.edu.co/docview/193520483?accountid=45809>. (193520483).

Zhang, L. (2009). Engaging University Learners in Critical Thinking to Stimulate Collaborative Learning: Perceptions of American and Chinese Students. (Order No. 3382636, University of South Dakota). *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*, 138-n/a. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.utp.edu.co/docview/304994532?accountid=45809>. (304994532).

Devante, V. et al. (2002). Collaborative Learning Environments Sourcebook. University of South Africa. Retrieved from [http://www.criticalmethods.org/collab/v.mv?d=1\\_1](http://www.criticalmethods.org/collab/v.mv?d=1_1)

Chiong, R., & Jovanovic, J. (2012). Collaborative Learning in Online Study Groups: An Evolutionary Game Theory Perspective. *Journal of Information Technology Education: Research*, volume 11

Ellis, A. (2001). Student-centered Collaborative Learning via Face-to-Face and

Synchronous Online Communication: What's the Difference? In *Proceedings of the 18th Annual Conference of the Australian Society for Computers in Learning in Tertiary Education* (pp. 169-177), Melbourne, Australia.

Warschauer, M. (1998). Interaction, Negotiation, and Computer-mediated Learning. In V. Darleguy, A. Ding, & M. Svensson (Eds.) *Educational Technology in language learning: Theoretical reflection and practical applications*. Lyon, France: National Institute of Applied Sciences, Center of Language Resources, p. 125-136.

Verhaart, M., & Kinshuk (2004). Creating a Virtual Face-to-Face Delivery Environment. Eastern Institute of Technology, Hawke's Bay, New Zealand. Retrieved from [http://www.col.org/pcf3/Papers/PDFs/Verhaart\\_Michael.pdf](http://www.col.org/pcf3/Papers/PDFs/Verhaart_Michael.pdf)

Kim, Kyung-Sun, & Moore, J. (2005). Web-based Learning: Factors Affecting Students' Satisfaction and Learning Experience. *First Monday* 10 (11). Retrieved from <http://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/1294/1214>

Howland J. L., & Moore, J. L. (2002). Student Perceptions as Distance Learners in Internet-based Courses: *Distance Education*, volume 23, number 2, pp. 183–195.

Alrumaih, A. A. (2004). Multimedia Instructional Applications for Pronunciation Instruction in English as a Foreign Language Setting in Saudi Arabia: A study of Attitudes, Beliefs, and Pedagogies. (Order No. 3155509, Kansas State University). *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*, p. 271-271

Anderson, J. (2010). UNESCO – ICT Transforming Education, a Regional Guide. UNESCO, Bangkok.

UNESCO (2005). “Hacia las Sociedades del Conocimiento”. Jouve, Mayenne France.

He, Lei (2011). “Metacognition in EFL Pronunciation Learning among Chinese Tertiary Learners”. *Applied Language Learning*, vol (21), pp.1 -27.

Moedjito (2008). “Priorities in English Pronunciation Teaching in EFL Classrooms”. *K@ta*, 10 (2), 129-142. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.utp.edu.co/docview/236705277?accountid=45809>

Wang, S., & V, C. (2012). “Web 2.0 and Second Language Learning: What does the Research tell us?” *CALICO Journal*, 29(3), 412-n/a. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.utp.edu.co/docview/1030124970?accountid=45809>

Ministerio de Educación Nacional (2012). Plan de Fortalecimiento de Competencias en Lengua Extranjera. Colombia

Bonilla, X. (2012). TEFL Educational Principles: a Proposal for Changing Times. Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas. Bogotá, Colombia.

Gilakjani, A. P. (2012). The Significance of Pronunciation in English Language Teaching. *English Language Teaching*, 5(4), 96-107. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.utp.edu.co/docview/1009897417?accountid=45809>

Hismanoglu, M. (2006). Current Perspectives on Pronunciation Learning and Teaching. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 2(1). Retrieved from <http://www.jlls.org/Issues/Volume%202/No.1/mhismanoglu.pdf>

Chen Jack, H., & Goswami, J. S. (2011). Structuring Cooperative Learning in Teaching English Pronunciation. *English Language Teaching*, 4(3), 26-32. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.utp.edu.co/docview/889136561?accountid=45809>

Le, L. H. (2007). Acquisition of English Pronunciation: A study of Vietnamese EFL Learners. (Order No. 1451047, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale). *ProQuest*

*Dissertations and Theses*, 116. Retrieved from  
<http://ezproxy.utp.edu.co/docview/304809883?accountid=45809>. (304809883).